



THE ROLE OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IN EMPLOYEES WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Dr. Harshita Shrimali¹ | Ms. Nandini Sinha²

¹ Dean & Provost- MMSS Vidyawadi, Pali, Rajasthan.

² Ph.D. Scholar & Visiting Faculty.

ABSTRACT

Things that matter the most should never be left at the mercy of the things that matter the least.

Goethe Work Life balance is now the second most important driver of employee retention, attraction and commitment says CEB research.

Work life balance, defined simply is meaningful achievement and enjoyment in everyday life. The role of work has changed throughout the world due to economic conditions and social demands. Over the years the role of work has evolved and the composition of workforce has changed. However, work life balance is a two pronged approach which involves the willingness of the organization as well as the employee towards this practice. While there are many WLB options (Flexitime/ Telecommuting / Child care / Elder Care/Paternity Leave/ Gym Subsidies) most have yet not changed their organizational culture to support employees who want to use WLB options.

Organisation Culture defines how employees should behave in a given set of circumstances. In this article we will analyze

- i. What are the components of the organization culture.
- ii. The manager's role in creating and sustaining culture.
- iii. What are the challenges in sustaining the culture.
- iv. What are the outcome if organization culture is work-life supportive.

KEYWORDS: Work-life Balance, Hours of Work, Family Life, Organisational Culture, Leadership.

INTRODUCTION:

The increased interest in balancing work and family life among government, academics and the media stems from dramatic changes in the labour market and family structures, for instance, increases in the number of dual earner households and increased participation of mothers in the labour market (Meadows, 1996; Gregg and Wadsworth, 1994; Dex, 1999). These trends have raised concerns about the potential for increased stress among employees imposed by multiple roles and long working hours (particularly of fathers) (Lewis, 1996; Ferri and Smith, 1996). Psychological research has identified a number of negative outcomes arising from work-life conflict; decreased psychological well-being and increased sickness absence (Evans and Steptoe, 2002), marital problems and family relationships (MacEwen and Barling, 1994; Crouter, *et al.*, 2001) psychological and physical health of employees partners (Westman, 2001); job and life satisfaction (Kossek and Ozeki, 1998; Adams, *et al.*, 1996) and heavy alcohol use (Frone, *et al.*, 1997).

Previous research indicates that organisational culture is a critical factor in ensuring the effectiveness of family-friendly policies (Lewis, 1997; Lewis, 2001). Holt and Thaulow (1996) argue that informal cultures may be just as important (if not more so) than formal policies at achieving work-life balance for employees.

Therefore, developing organisational cultures which support work-life balance can be a daunting process as the concept of culture can be quite an abstract idea.

Theoretical perspectives on organisational culture:

The term "organisational culture" has proved extremely popular with management theorist and managers alike since the publication of *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman, 1982). The term "culture" has its theoretical roots within social anthropology and was first used in a holistic way to describe the qualities of a human group that are passed from one generation to the next. It was described by Taylor (1971): culture . . . taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

Organisational culture provides a people-centred, theoretical perspective on the management of change that is seen to offer some insight into the "intangible" nature of organisations and their behaviour: a contrasting approach to the traditional management view of organisation (formal structures, rules and procedures and rational argument). The problem lies in the generation and use of new tools and techniques within the organisational culture perspective which makes the "people management, the management of change and the realisation of strategic objectives, easier to accomplish" (Brown, 1992, p. 3).

Culture as an independent variable:

Viewing culture as an independent variable looks at how it is imported into the organisation through the membership. This view takes as its key premise that there are specific characteristics of "good" cultures that are universal and easily imported into the organisation. Modern management theory exhorts managers to create corporate cultures which dovetail with effective corporate strategy (Davis, 1984). This is also considered to be one of the main success factors for "Excellent" or "Theory Z" organisations (Ouchi W., 1981). Organisations are told to apply generic formulae in order to obtain a corporate culture of an appropriate and productive form.

The crucial assumption here is that culture is an objective and tangible phenomenon which can be changed through the application of direct intervention methods. Appropriate research methods attempt to analyse and audit culture and seek to provide a basis for action in changing culture.

Culture as a dependent variable:

From this perspective organisations are themselves culture-producing phenomena and are essentially social instruments which produce goods (Smircich, 1983). Accordingly, each culture is a unique product of its history, development and present situational issues. Cultures also produce distinctive artefacts, such as rituals, legends and ceremonies as by-products. While organisations are embedded within a wider cultural context, this view emphasises the sociocultural qualities that develop within organisations.

Authors who adopt this perspective construe the culture concept within a systems theory framework which holds that the organisations exist largely in a determined relationship with their environment. According to Deal and Kennedy (1982), culture adds to the systemic balance and effectiveness of the organisation i.e. "through a strong culture". The key is to achieve sufficient cultural integration across the varied areas of the organisation in order to effect sufficiently coordinated strategy or action, whilst maintaining the unique value systems at the local levels. Culture is the glue that holds the organisation together. It expresses the values or social ideals and shared beliefs, which are manifest in the specialised language that is unique to each organisation and which are a product of the history and operational experience within the organisation.

Culture as shared values and beliefs gives identity to members and generates commitment beyond the "self", and enhances social system stability.

It is also a sense-making device that guides and shapes behaviour. Firms that have cultures supportive of strategy are likely to be successful, while firms that have insufficient "fit" between strategy and culture must change since it is the

culture which supports the strategy (Pascare, 1990).

In this paper therefore we are going to understand that:

1. What is the definition of Organisational Culture?
2. Managers / leader's role in creating and sustaining organizational culture that supports work-life balance
3. The challenges or barriers to developing a culture supporting work-life balance.

There are plenty of definitions on the meaning of organisational culture:

"Organizational culture or corporate culture is the pattern of values, norms, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions that may not have been articulated but shape the ways in which people behave and things get done" (Armstrong, 2006).

Organisational culture can be also defined as "a system of informal rules which guide people's behaviour through the majority of time" (Deal and Kennedy, 1982, 2000)

or as "beliefs, values and hypotheses shared, existent in an organisation" (Johns, 1998).

"Culture is a system of shared symbols" (Geertz, 1973).

In another vision, organisational culture means "the pattern of basic principles or postulates that were created, discovered or developed by a specific group, learning to solve the problems of external environment adaptation and of internal integration, which proved to be efficient enough to be considered valid and which, as a consequence, can be taught to the new members as the right way of perception, thinking and feeling relating to these problems" (Tellier and Tessier, 1998).

Chis, u considers that organisational culture is "a combination of rules, values, beliefs and behaviours that characterise the way that groups and individuals interact at work.

Culture illustrates how work is going on, and the people are treated within the organisation" (Chis, u, 2002).

"Culture is a basic pattern of assumptions . . . that has worked well enough to be considered valid, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems" (Schein, 1992).

According to Schein (2004), organizational culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin. Organisational culture points to avisible phenomena. ".....culture is to group what personality or character is to an individual". The result is a certain behavior controlled by invisible forces. Organisational culture guides the behavior of an employee in an organization through the shared norms that are held in the organization.

As a consequence of all these theoretical delimitations, it is to be noticed that, in an organisation, culture influences all the rest of its components and the organisation seen as a whole. Thus, culture is responsible for some rules which govern the behaviour in different situations: this will be applied as a response to a large series of phenomena that occur within the organisation, defining the communication style (who communicates with whom, how does he/she communicate, etc.), the reward system and generally defining the company's strategy.

Components of Organisational Culture:

In our approach, organisational culture encapsulates an ensemble of material and spiritual elements (Ca'mpeanu-Sonea and Sonea, 2006a, b). While some of them are observable, others are difficult to identify, and while some are assimilated, others are not. All these elements, generally speaking, characterise the existence, the functioning and the development of a company's human resource.

The components are differently classified or characterised by various authors, and their extension represents a controversial aspect. In our opinion, this notion can be visualised as a fruit with distinct elements within the exterior layer – the peel (solid and easily noticeable) – the core (more viscous and adaptable), and the kernel, which is difficult to identify, analyse and especially modify.

The first level of organisational culture comprises elements such as architecture, working technique, layout of offices, dress code, organisational structure, articles of association, regulations, working documents, behaviour, slogans, quality of services, knowledge, innovation skills, and the members' capacity to contribute to the organization's activity and development.

The second level of organisational culture encapsulates the following elements: values and regulations, risk-assuming capacity, views on the development of the organization, its members, and the services provided, etc. reflected in the symbols and language used in the organization, as well as in the "organizational folklore".

The third level of organisational culture includes beliefs, principles, hypotheses

related to the direction and the modalities of a company's development, which influence the way problems are understood and solved, and the nature of human relationships, partially assimilated or unassimilated elements, elements belonging to interior of the human structure that have been educated or crystallised in time and are very difficult to understand, analyse or modify.

The same approach can be found at Edgar H. Schein, who considers organisational culture as being stratified on three levels: "artefacts-visible organisation structure and processes (hard to decipher); espoused beliefs and values strategies, goals, philosophies (espoused justifications); underlying assumptions – unconscious taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings . . . (ultimate source of values and actions)" (Schein, 2004).

Important differences between countries and geographic zones are also being emphasized (Trompenaars, 1993), as well as the role of different factors (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Schein, 1993; Ca'mpeanu-Sonea et al., 2008).

Work Life Balance:

Amongst the many definitions of work-life balance, the majority include the idea of "satisfying roles" and striking equality between home and work roles. With this in mind, Clarke (2000, p. 749) views work-life balance as the "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict".

Sturges and Guest (2004) point to the growing aspiration amongst people to balance work with other aspects of their life, and that this is directly linked to the long hours that many individuals feel they have to devote to work.

This is supported by Mullins (2005, p. 719) who found that almost 60 per cent of surveyed managers valued their work and home life equally.

Work-life balance problems have been better documented than the effectiveness of the program designed to alleviate them (Eversole et al 2007). Organisational policies / benefits provide employees with more control over the condition of work and allows them to attend private life needs.

Karasek's Job Demand-Control Model:

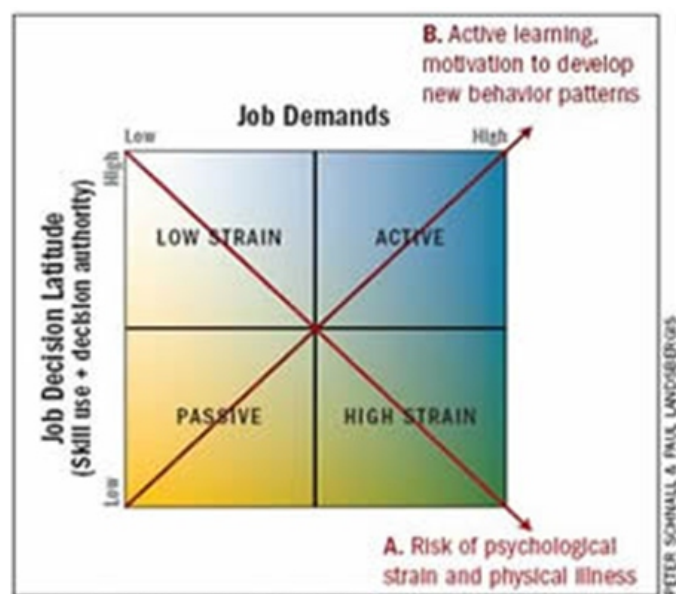


Figure 1: Karasek's Job Demand-Control Model:

In a survey conducted in Hongkong, 40% employees reported they would consider leaving their current role for one that offers better work-life balance. This figure became significantly more troublingly when surveying the Gen Y's or the 'post 80's generation' who demonstrate a much lower tolerance for poor work-life balance - 67% of these employees said they would leave their current position for one that allows them the opportunity to better balance work and life commitments.

Direct impact on business:

Certain type of organizational culture have been associated with either positive or negative outcomes for either the organization or for individual employees. Positive outcome for the individuals include motivation and satisfaction while negative outcomes includes job insecurity and stress (Balthazard et al. 2006). Constructive organizational culture has positive impact on both organizational and individual level while dysfunctional culture has negative impact on both (Balthazard et al. 2006).

Thompson et al (1999), suggest at least three possible components of work life culture.

First concerns norm about the hours spent at work and employees use of time. Time-based conflict has been identified as a major source of work-life conflict and this occurs when time pressure in one role, for instance work, makes it difficult to comply with expectations in the other role that is private life.

The second component of work life conflict concerned perceived negative career consequences associated with utilizing work life benefits or devoting time to family responsibility (Thompson *et al* 1999). In many organizational culture, visibility is a norm and "face-time" an indicator of the employee contribution and commitment to work. Participating in work life programmes or utilizing benefits as flexible working hours or location may undermine the employees' possibilities to be seen as an employee who is committed.

The third component of work-life component concerns managerial support and sensitivity to employee family responsibility (Thompson *et al* 1999). Managerial support on a daily basis may not be the most critical culture variable in employees' decisions to use family friendly benefits and programmes.

As many as 77.7% of employees in a 2010 Survey carried out in Hongkong reported having experienced problems due to poor work-life balance. The top three cited problems negatively impacting on employees included:

- Prolonged fatigue levels, sleepiness and extreme tiredness (57.2%)
- No time to spend with partner and family (37.0%)
- Insomnia and poor diet as a result of work pressure (34.9%)

Statistics like these have serious implications not only for employees but companies as well. Issues related to poor work-life balance pose a serious threat to business, particularly for those companies looking to establish themselves as employers of choice. As the war for talent intensifies, it is clear that employers need to differentiate themselves from the competition and address this issue. Companies who fail to do so face a risk to their competitive advantage. But there is another argument too. Employees who are overworked, unhealthy and unhappy are also generally less productive with higher rates of absenteeism and sick leave.

To cite an example Samsung Electronics has not only contributed to balancing work and life but also to improving productivity by adopting a flexible work schedule in Korea to help eliminate unnecessary overtime and to maximize work performance through effective time management. We introduced a pilot, flexible work schedule in our TV, mobile phone, and consumer electronics sectors beginning in 2009 and expanded it to all divisions in 2010. Under this new effort, employees arrive at work between 6.00 a.m. and 1.00 p.m. and to work eight hours per day. As of March 2012, approximately 65,000 Korean employees have taken advantage of this system out of a total of 100,000 Korean employees. We believe it is important for everyone to be able to assume personal responsibility for their time. This will continue to contribute to a working atmosphere that allows employees to focus on their job in an autonomous and creative atmosphere. (Samsung Electronics Sustainability Report 2012)

Existing Cultural Barriers:

It is believed that there are a number of common barriers which exist within organisations and prevent work-life balance from becoming a reality. While some of these barriers are more general and experienced throughout many businesses globally and may be compounded by a multitude of cultural issues.

Barrier 1: Educating employees to take ownership of their work-life balance

Barrier 2: Companies struggle to develop a robust business case

Barrier 3: Companies fear work-life balance will make them less competitive

Barrier 4: Managerial posts cannot be part-time

Barrier 5: Work-life balance is not an option for senior roles

Barrier 6: A widespread assumption that visibility equals productivity

Barrier 7: Managers are not embracing work-life balance

Barrier 8: Work-life balance means a loss of control

Barrier 9: Work-life balance is simply not possible in a 24/7 environment

Barrier 10: There is no way to measure the success of work-life balance initiatives.

Organisations can make their effort to address these cultural barriers to achieve work-life balance.

Addressing Barrier 1: How do we educate and empower people to take ownership of their work-life balance? (Employer vs. Employee)

Addressing Barrier 2: How do we build the business case for work-life balance?

Addressing Barrier 3: How can we be sure we won't lose competitiveness and customers if we try and institute work-life balance programmes?

Addressing Barrier 4: How can we make part-time roles available for managerial posts?

Addressing Barrier 5: Does getting to the top mean no work-life balance?

Addressing Barrier 6: How do we challenge the assumption that visibility equals productivity?

Addressing Barrier 7: What consequences should there be for managers who do not embrace work-life balance?

Addressing Barrier 8: How do we deal with fear of loss of control?

Addressing Barrier 9: How do we work in a 24/7 environment but maintain work-life balance?

Addressing Barrier 10: How do we measure the success of flexible work arrangements?

We conclude this by saying that it is very important that organizations working in global atmosphere recognize the critical success factor that work-life balance / flexibility is for both organization and individual.

Originality/value – This paper provides important recommendations for employers and HR managers, designing and implementing work-life balance policies. Work life balance issues, presently considered largely external from the employer perspective, have central relevance.

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